

Creating Policies to Govern Software Development

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Gerry de Koning

gerry@dekoning.on.ca



de Koning Associates Inc.

www.dekoning.on.ca

The knowledge-based organization...

is not like a command and control organization
has more specialists
concentrates knowledge at lower levels
is much flatter

(Peter Drucker, HBR, Jan-Feb 1988)

Senior Executives...

often have no experience in software development, but

- the business depends on software developed in their organizations
- they cannot effectively coach or coordinate software development
- they are accountable for what the software development group contributes to the business

The thesis of this talk

Executives govern, rather than manage, software development.

Policy governance is a good framework for separating Executive and Staff roles.

The executive, with wisdom and a wide knowledge of the business, sets the goals and limits within which the specialists will develop the software.

Our Agenda

What is John Carver's Policy Governance Model™?

How can it be used to govern software development?

How do we go about implementing a software governance model?

Definition: Governance

To govern is to define the ENDS, limit the MEANS, and MONITOR the performance of the governed.

To govern is not to coach, not to coordinate, not to make day-to-day decisions.

To govern is to think through issues and define policies which apply generally; avoid case-by-case decisions.

Definition: Management

To manage is to direct the work of others,
coaching and coordinating as required.

Management includes setting objectives and
monitoring performance.

Managing requires some knowledge of the work
to be managed.

Managers make day-to-day decisions

What is Policy Governance?

A model defined by John Carver for the Boards of non-profit groups

An attempt to maximize the contribution of Boards to the organization.

Clearly separates Staff and Board roles.

Boards are the “wise ones” who speak for the “moral ownership” and guard the mission and vision of the organization.

Types of Policies

Ends

Means

Monitoring

Board Process

Policies about Ends

Ends specify what the benefits will be for whom and at what price

Ends are the most changeable of policies, the most difficult to create and require the most maintenance

Don't create Ends policies first

- people probably have a good idea of objectives already
- they are easier to create when the rest of the framework is in place

Policies about Means

These policies set limits on how Staff will achieve the Ends

Limits spell out unacceptable means—what is not prudent, not ethical or not legal

Rather than approve proposals, the Board spells out, in advance, what it would reject

Avoid the temptation to (micro)manage; phrase policies negatively (Don't do this or that) rather than prescriptively

Policies about Monitoring

Specify what data the Board needs to evaluate whether the policies are being followed and interpreted reasonably

Staff can have much latitude about how to choose and present the data, but the Board must be satisfied that the policies are satisfied

Policies cover monitoring mechanisms and frequency

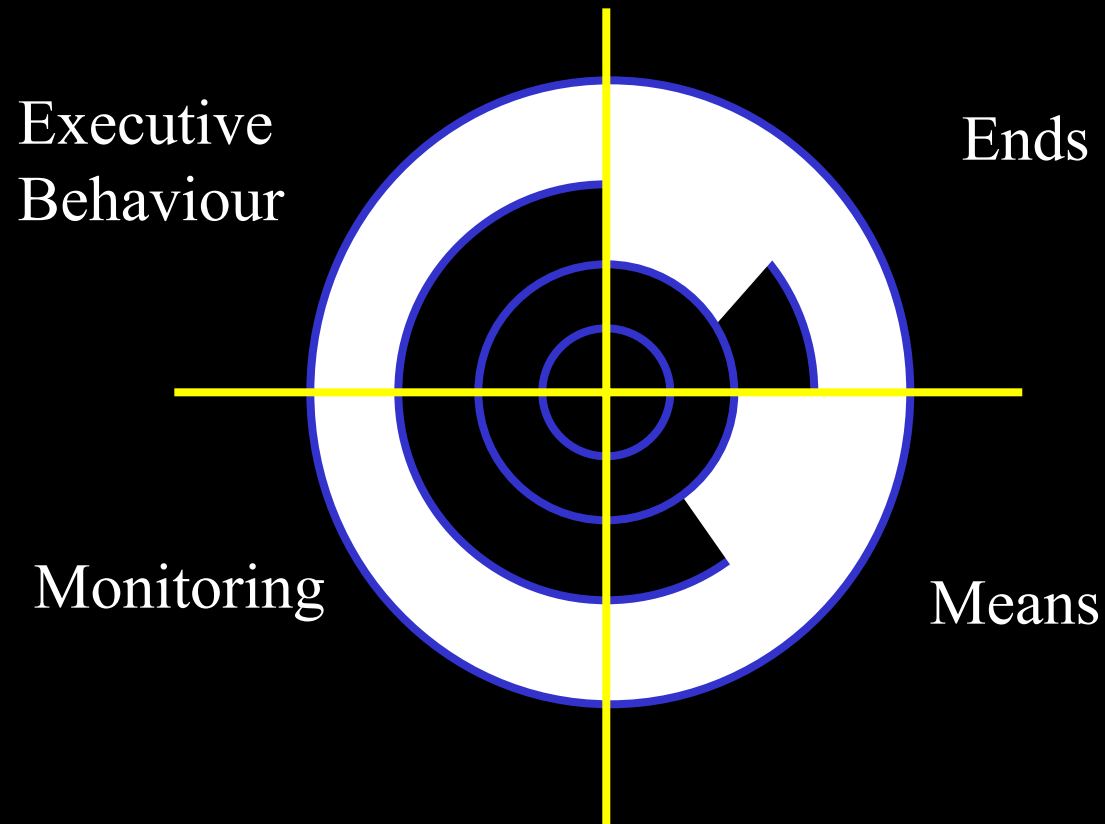
Policies about Board Process

Policies spell out how the Board will perform its role

Define what the Staff may expect from the Board

In software governance we use a category of “Executive Behaviour” rather than “Board Process”

Policy Development: layer by layer



Policy Development: layer by layer

Create top level policies first

Create subsidiary policies as needed

There are no gaps

All reasonable interpretations are accepted

Details can be filled in by Staff, layer by layer

Application to Software Development

Executive role similar to Board role

Software managers similar to Staff role

Same categories of policies are needed

Policies are specific to software development

Each management layer or project can make
specific policies more precise

Example Software Means Policy

Software will not be developed in any way which is imprudent, unethical, illegal, or in violation of corporate policies

- Examples of topics for sub-policies:
 - Project Management
 - Project authorization
 - Subcontracting
 - Configuration Management
 - Staffing

Summary of Software Governance

Separate roles of Executives and Software Staff

Executives, custodians of vision and values,
contribute wisdom and broad knowledge

Executives are not experts in software
development

Better control of software development with less
micromanagement

Software staff are empowered

Now What?

Are you ready for a new type of organization?

Are you ready to completely revise the way you run your organization?

Is your executive team committed to make this work?

Are you prepared to stick with it until the changes are firmly established?

Further reading

John Carver: Boards that Make a Difference
(1997)

John Carver: Reinventing your Board (1997)

(coming soon) www.dekoning.on.ca